

The 1001 Critical Days

The Importance of the Conception to Age Two Period

A CROSS-PARTY MANIFESTO:

Andrea Leadsom MP • Frank Field MP • Paul Burstow MP • Caroline Lucas MP



Sally

Foreword by **Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer**

I am delighted to support this cross party manifesto. This manifesto highlights the importance of acting early to enhance the outcomes for children. Too many children and young people do not have the start in life they need, leading to high costs for society, and too many affected lives.

The early years of life are a crucial period of change; alongside adolescence this is a key moment for brain development. As our understanding of the science of development improves, it becomes clearer and clearer how the events that happen to children and babies lead to structural changes that have life-long ramifications. Science is helping us to understand how love and nurture by caring adults is hard wired into the brains of children.

We know too that not intervening now will affect not just this generation of children and young people but also the next. Those who suffer multiple adverse childhood events achieve less educationally, earn less, and are less healthy, making it more likely that the cycle of harm is perpetuated, in the following generation.

This manifesto is welcome as it seeks to use best practice to guide suggested interventions. The call to evaluate new interventions in a rigorous scientific manner is particularly important. I appreciate the emphasis on training of all staff who come into contact with children, young people and their families, in important areas such as attachment.

The current economic situation makes early intervention seem challenging. This manifesto recognises that without a focus on prevention and early intervention the costs associated with managing these issues will continue to rise.

Acting to improve the first critical 1001 days is a worthy goal. As CMO, I wholeheartedly support the aims of this manifesto because giving children and young people a good start in life should surely be more than just an aspiration!



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Introduction by MPs



Andrea Leadson

As politicians from across the political spectrum, we have come together for the first time to acknowledge the importance of the 1001 critical days from when a baby is conceived until the age of two.

This period of life is crucial to increase children's life chances, and we pledge to work to ensure all babies have the best possible start in life.



Paul Fiddow

We are missing an opportunity if we don't prevent problems before they arise. It is vital that a focus on the early years is placed at the heart of the policy making process, and in this manifesto we outline why this period of life is so critical, and how we intend to propel our objectives forward.



Paul Fiddow



Catherine Lewis

Special thanks to the **WAVE Trust** and the **NSPCC** for their support and contributions to produce the *1001 Critical Days Manifesto*.



Tackling the roots of violence





Why is the Conception to Age 2 period so critical?

Pregnancy, birth and the first 24 months can be tough for every mother and father, and some parents may find it hard to provide the care and attention their baby needs. But it can also be a chance to affect great change, as pregnancy and the birth of a baby is a critical 'window of opportunity' when parents are especially receptive to offers of advice and support.

The evidence shows that:

- Ensuring that the brain achieves its optimum development and nurturing during this peak period of growth is therefore vitally important, and enables babies to achieve the best start in life.
- From **birth to age 18 months**, connections in the brain are created at a rate of **one million per second!** The earliest experiences shape a baby's brain development, and have a lifelong impact on that baby's mental and emotional health.
- A foetus or baby exposed to toxic stress can have their responses to stress (cortisol) distorted in later life. This early stress can come from the mother suffering from symptoms of depression or anxiety, having a bad relationship with her partner, or an external trauma such as bereavement.
- International studies show that when a baby's development falls behind the norm during the first year of life, it is then much more likely to fall even further behind in subsequent years, than to catch up with those who have had a better start.
- Attachment is the bond between a baby and its caregiver/s. There is longstanding evidence that a baby's social and emotional development is strongly affected by the quality of their attachment.
- Babies are disproportionately vulnerable to abuse and neglect. In England they are seven times more likely to be killed than older children. Around 26% of babies (198,000) in the UK are estimated to be living within complex family situations, of heightened risk where there are problems such as substance misuse, mental illness or domestic violence. 36% of serious case reviews involve a baby under one.

The best chance to turn this around is during the **1001 critical days**. At least one loving, sensitive and responsive relationship with an adult caregiver teaches the baby to believe that the world is a good place and reduces the risk of them facing disruptive issues in later life.

Every child deserves an equal opportunity to lead a healthy and fulfilling life, and with the right kind of early intervention, there is every opportunity for secure parent infant attachments to be developed.

Whether out of concern for an individual baby's well-being or safety, or for the costs to society of poor attachment, it is imperative that how children are raised is guided and influenced by this principle and the evidence.

THE 1001 CRITICAL DAYS MANIFESTO IS CALLING FOR A REFOCUSING OF SUPPORT FOR A BABY'S FIRST 1001 DAYS.

IDENTIFYING NEED EARLY IS CRITICAL TO PREVENTING THE ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF BABIES AND IMPROVING THEIR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING.

A BABY'S DEVELOPMENT CAN BE DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED WITH **EARLY AND EFFECTIVE SUPPORT** FOR PARENTS.

PREGNANCY AND THE SECOND YEAR ARE A CRITICAL STAGE IN A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT.

DAMAGE EARLY ON CAN CAUSE **STRESS-RELATED** CONDITIONS IN **ADULT LIFE**, SUCH AS **HEART DISEASE** OR **SUBSTANCE ABUSE**.

ADAPTED FROM THE NSPCC'S 2011 ALL BABIES COUNT CAMPAIGN

26% OF BABIES IN THE UK HAVE A PARENT AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, MENTAL HEALTH OR DRUG/ALCOHOL PROBLEMS.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECTS

39,000 BABIES

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AFFECT **144,000** BABIES

DRUG OR ALCOHOL PROBLEMS AFFECT **109,000** BABIES

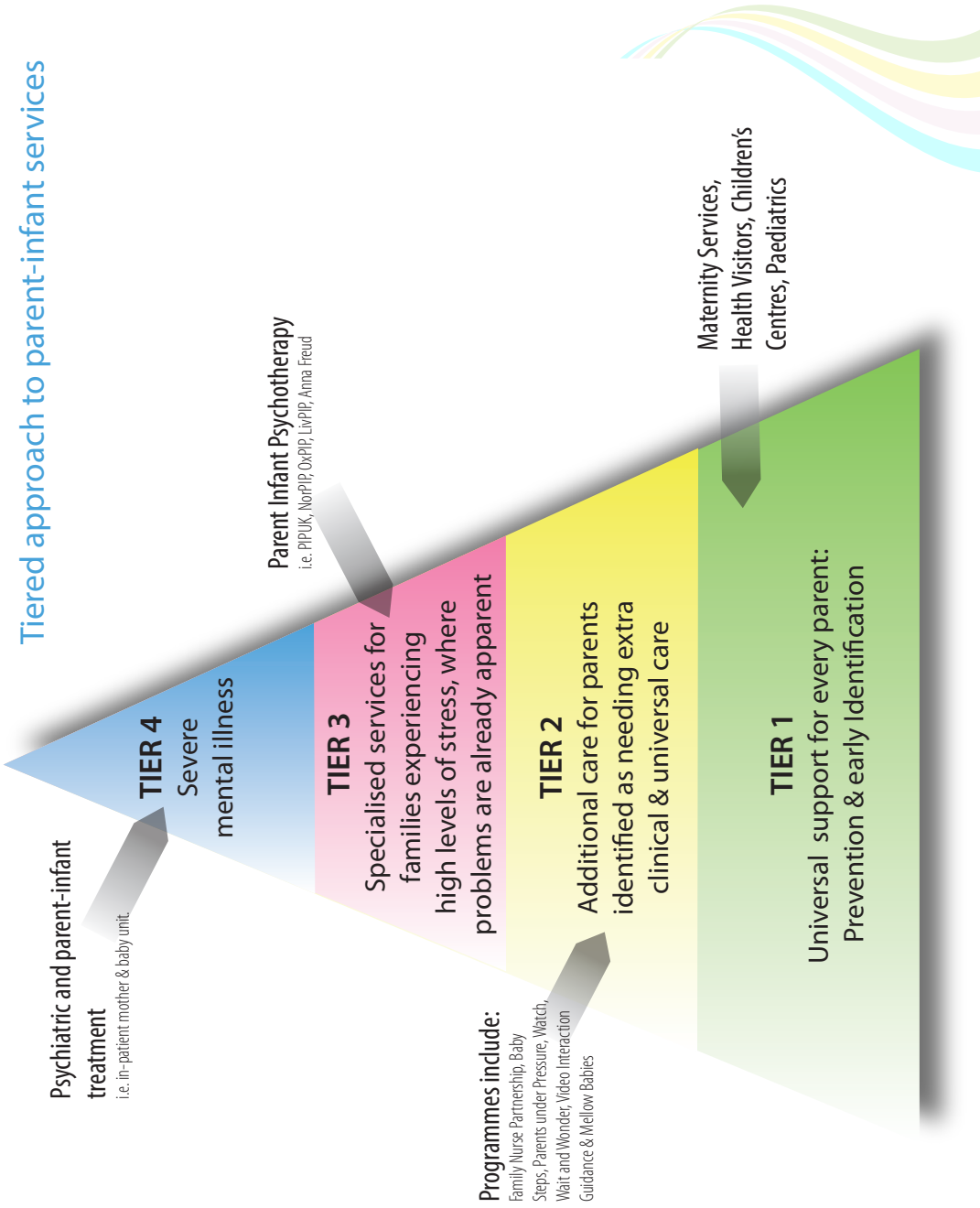
AT LEAST ONE OF THESE ISSUES APPEARS IN **OVER 70% OF CASES** WHERE A BABY HAS BEEN 'KILLED' OR SERIOUSLY INJURED.

36%

OF SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS - INTO DEATHS OR SERIOUS ABUSE - INVOLVE A CHILD **UNDER ONE**.

HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CAN BE 'TOXIC' TO THE DEVELOPING BRAIN.

Tiered approach to parent-infant services





Our Vision

A radical change is required to our approach to the 1001 Critical Days.

Our goal is for every baby to receive sensitive and responsive care from their main caregivers in the first years of life. Parents need to feel confident to raise their children in a loving and supportive environment.

A holistic approach to all ante, peri (conception to the first 18 months of life) and postnatal services would enable seamless access for all families. This includes Midwives, Health Visitors, GPs, and Children's Centres, and services should engage with families as soon as possible – ideally during pregnancy. The contact that parents have with services before, and after, the birth of their child, provides a unique opportunity to work with them at a stage which is so vitally important to the development of children.

Specifically:

- At-risk families, or those experiencing difficulties, should be able to access evidence-based services which promote parent-infant interaction, for example video interaction guidance and parent infant psychotherapy, delivered by qualified professionals.
- A range of services must be in place in every local area to ensure that women who are at risk or suffering from mental health problems are given appropriate support at the earliest opportunity. This includes specialist parent and infant mental health midwives and health visitors trained in this area, to improve identification and support for families who need it most.
- All parents should be able to access antenatal classes which address both the physical *and* emotional aspects of parenthood, and the baby's well-being (infant mental health).

To enable this to happen local services must identify and reach families who need additional services:

- Maternity services, health visitors, social care, adult mental health services and Children's Centres should work closely together to share vital data, ensuring those who need additional support receive appropriate, timely, and culturally sensitive help. The pooling of budgets for these services will encourage innovative commissioning and induce a culture of joined-up working.



- NICE Guidelines recommending that every woman with a history of past or present serious mental illness should have access to a Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrist and specialist perinatal psychological care for mother and baby, must be followed.
- Birth registration should be offered by local registrars in Children's Centres, so that close to 100% of families will engage with their local centre.
- The health and early years workforce should receive high quality training in infant mental health and attachment as standard, in order for practitioners to understand parent-infant relationships and the services required when difficulties arise. Specialist training should include identifying the 5-7% most seriously ill and at-risk parents.
- There should be increased evaluation of services in the first 1001 days, to prove their effectiveness, including a scientific evaluation (Randomised Control Trial) of parent-infant psychotherapy, as a key intervention for insecure or disorganised attachment.
- Local commissioning and decision making boards should consider the social and emotional health needs of babies, and include information about this in their Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Local Health and Well-being Strategy. Underpinning this should be a cost-benefit analysis to capture the full extent of the costs to society that can be avoided through effective investment in the first 1001 days.
- Childminders, nurseries and childcare settings caring for under 2s must focus on the attachment needs of babies and infants, with OFSTED providing specific guidance on how this can be measured effectively.
- Children's Centres must continue to provide universal services for all families, but with a focus on those families with the highest level of need.
- Outreach and volunteer services will potentially provide the greatest success in reaching the most vulnerable and isolated families.
- Health and early years professionals should encourage parents to read to their children as an effective and straightforward way of strengthening early attachment and language development.



Pledges of Support

The following organisations have pledged their support for the 1001 Critical Days Manifesto:



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booktrust
Inspiring a love of books



THE COLLEGE OF SOCIALWORK
The voice of social work in England



Marcé Society
Maternal Mental Health Alliance

With thanks for their support to:

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For more information please see *WAVE Trust's Age of Opportunity* report, and the NSPCC's *Spotlight on Perinatal Mental Health*, and *All Babies Count* reports

To join the 1001 Critical Days campaign, please email

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